

9/17/2004

To: The U.S. Senate Committee on Indian affairs  
Oversight Hearing on The Contributions of Native American Code Talkers:  
Re: Contributions of Native American Code Talkers

My name is William C. Meadows. I am an Assistant Professor of Anthropology in the Department of Sociology-Anthropology at Southwest Missouri State University in Springfield, Missouri, where I teach in the Anthropology and native American Studies programs. I am the author of the book entitled *The Comanche Code Talkers of World War II*, published in 2002 by the University of Texas Press.

To date the majority of published works focusing on Native American Code Talkers have focused almost exclusively on the Navajo and consist of over fifty books and articles, and many more newspaper articles. Although many of these works are commendable and accurately record the Navajo Code Talker's military service, they are largely popular and not academic works. In addition these works have not explored the contributions of other Native Americans from other tribes who also served as code talkers.

To my knowledge I am the only person who has researched and published an academic oriented work on Native American Code Talkers. The information contained in this report is taken largely from this text.

In this work I produced a chronological history of Native American Code Talking. Beginning with its initial inception with the Oklahoma Choctaw during World War I. I then trace the use of other tribes in that war, the pre-war recruitment and training of tribes for potential use in World War II, a series of debates between the branches of the United States Armed Forces concerning whether or not to expand and or use the Native American Code Talkers in World War II; the boarding school experiences, recruitment, training, and actual combat service of Native American Code Talkers in World War II; subsequent post war developments and recognitions, and a comparison of the experiences of Comanche and Navajo as code talkers. One part of this research focused on identifying as many tribes as possible, and where possible the names of individuals, who served as code talkers in both world wars.

The research for this book combined several forms: surveys of published sources, survey of relevant sources in the military archives at the National Archives, the National Security Agency, the Marine Corps Archives, and extensive first hand interviews with the surviving Comanche Code Talkers, their training officer Major General. Ret. Hugh F. Foster, and fellow Signal Corps members. For the data pertaining to the Choctaw, I collaborated extensively with Judy Allen, a Choctaw tribal member and editor of the Choctaw Tribal newspaper *Bishinik*. Mrs. Allen had undertaken extensive research on the Choctaw Code Talkers who served in World War I. Other tribes and members who served as code talkers during both world wars were identified through archival research and news releases.

## Types of Native American Code Talking

My research determined that there were in fact two types of Native American Code Talking, which I designate as Type 1 and Type 2 Native American Code Talking (NACT). While both involve the use of Native American languages for secure transmission of military intelligence, the distinguishing factor is the presence or absence of specially formulated code words placed within the vernacular structures of these languages. These two forms of coded communications may be distinguished as:

Type 1 – Formally developed and special coded-encoded vocabularies used within Native American languages.

Type 2 – The informal use of everyday non-coded Native American languages.

Determining which form of NACT was used with which tribes is sometimes difficult. From historical records and first hand accounts I have been able to determine that Type 1 Native American Code Talkers include the Choctaws in World War I, and the Comanche, Navajo, and Hopi in World War II. Because they were recruited prior to World War II, the Mesquakie (Sac and Fox) and the Chippewa/Oneida groups may have also undertaken code training and formation and thus qualify as Type 1 groups.

Type 2 Native American Code Talkers include all other groups presently identified as having performed code talking. Because the background of how some of these small units were formed and whether or not they constructed formally designed codes within their languages or simply spoke in their everyday language, we must at present, assume that they were in fact Type 2 groups. These groups, and where possible their units, are listed below.

### Other Units

While the subject of Native American Code Talkers is at an all-time high in the United States and several western European countries, the popular image is limited concerning the number of tribes, the number of individuals that served in this manner, and their distribution in the United States Armed Services. Most individuals know only of the Navajo, and while they were the largest group of Native American Code Talkers and served with exemplary distinction, members of at least 18 other tribes served as code talkers during World Wars I and II.

## Identification of Native American Code Talkers By Tribe

Those are tribes I have been able to identify as having served as Native American Code Talkers include the following:

### World War I

<u>Tribe</u>	<u>Type of Code talking</u>	<u>Unit</u>
Cherokee	2	Probably 36 <sup>th</sup> Div.
Cheyenne	2	Presently unknown.
Choctaw (15)	1	Co. E, 142 <sup>nd</sup> Inf. Reg., 36 <sup>th</sup> Div. 143 <sup>rd</sup> Inf. Reg., 36 <sup>th</sup> Div.
Comanche	2	Presently Unknown
Osage	2	Probably 36 <sup>th</sup> Div.
Yankton Sioux	2	Presently Unknown

### World War II

Assiniboine	2	Co. B, 163 <sup>rd</sup> Inf. Div.
Cherokee	2	Presently Unknown
Chippewa/Oneida (17)	2*	32 <sup>nd</sup> Inf. Div.
Choctaw	2	K. Co., 180 <sup>th</sup> Inf. Reg., 45 <sup>th</sup> Inf. Div.
Comanche (17)	1	4 <sup>th</sup> Sig. Co., 4 <sup>th</sup> Inf. Div.
Hopi (11)	1	U.S. Army 223 <sup>rd</sup> Batt.
Kiowa (3)	2	689 <sup>th</sup> Fld. Art. Batt., XX Corps
Menominee	2	Presently Unknown
Muscogee/Creek And Seminole	2	a. 195 <sup>th</sup> Fld Art. Batt. b. Aleutian Campaign
Navajo (420)	1	U.S. Marine Corps, 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 4 <sup>th</sup> , 5 <sup>th</sup> Divs.
Pawnee	2	Presently Unknown
Sac and Fox (19)	2*	18 <sup>th</sup> Iowa inf.
Sioux (Lakota and Dakota dialects)	2	a. 302 <sup>nd</sup> Rec. Team, 1 <sup>st</sup> Cav. Div. b. 32 <sup>nd</sup> Fld. Art. Batt., 19 <sup>th</sup> Reg. Combat Team

\* Because the Chippewa-Oneida and the Sac and Fox (Mesquakie) were specifically recruited for communications work, some code formation may have occurred but is presently unknown.

## **Individual Identification of Native American Code Talkers**

Those individuals I have been able to identify as having served as Native American Code talkers include the following:

### World War I

#### Choctaw:

Solomon Bond Louis  
Albert Billy  
Mitchell Bobb  
James Edwards  
Victor Brown  
Ben Carterby  
Joseph Oklahombi  
Walter Veach  
Calvin Wilson  
Robert Taylor  
Pete Maytubby  
Benjamin W. Hampton  
Jeff Nelson  
Tobias Frazier  
Benjamin Colbert

### World War II

#### Comanche:

Forrest Kassanavoid  
Roderick Red Elk  
Elgin Red Elk  
Charles Chibitty  
Wellington Mihecoby  
Simmons Parker  
Larry Saupitty  
Melvin Permansu  
Willie Yacheschi  
Morris Tabbyetchy  
Perry Noyabad  
Haddon Codynah  
Robert Holder  
Clifford Ottiivo

Albert Nahquaddy, Anthony Tabbytite, and Ralph Wahnee also trained as code talkers, but were discharged prior to active combat.

Hopi: (3 of the 11 Hopi Code Talkers have been identified)

Franklin Shupla

Travis Yaiva,

Floyd Dann

Mesquakie: (8 of 19 Mesquakie Code Talkers have been identified).

Dewey Youngbear

Frank Sanache

Willie Sanache

Judy Wayne

Mike Wayne

Dewey Roberts

Edward Benson

Melvin Twin

Choctaw:

Schlicht Billy

Andrew Perry

Davis Pickens

Forrester T. Baker

Dakota-Lakota (Europe):

Simon Broken Leg

Jeffrey Dull Knife

Garfield T. Brown

Anthony Omaha Boy

John C. Smith

Lakota-Dakota (Pacific):

Phillip LeBlanc

Edmund St. John

Baptiste Pumpkinseed

Eddie Eagle Boy

Guy Rondell

John Bear King

Assiniboine (1 of 5 reported Assiniboine members has been identified) :

James Turning Bear

Kiowa:

John Tsatoke, James Paddlety, Leonard Cozad Sr.

Muscogee:

Edmund Harjo

Leslie Richards

Navajo: A complete list of the 420 Navajo who served as code talkers during World War II can be found in various books on the Navajo Code Talkers

\*Complete listings of these individuals and, for some individuals their military units, may be found in Meadows (2002:26-27, 67-71, 82).

### Unique Circumstances and Service

Native American Code Talkers provided a unique form of military service that non-Indians lacked, a language unfamiliar to the Germans, Italians, and Japanese.

They were recruited and or enlisted in their final years of high school or just thereafter. In many instances these individuals had attended schools that strictly prohibited the use of Indian languages and in some instances punished Indians for speaking their native tongue. Their willingness to serve reflects not only their pride in their own cultures, but their willingness to assist the United States Government, who until the 1934 continued to maintain numerous legal limitations on Indian rights, in the defense of the nation.

Most importantly, none of the Native American languages and or codes used in the United States Armed Forces are known to have ever been broken by enemy forces. Thus their contributions provided a much faster means of communication than traditional cryptographic systems using systems of encoding and decoding.

Although smaller than the Navajo counterparts, the other Native American tribes that served as code talkers in World Wars I and II should not be judged by their numbers, but by the unique historical circumstances of their bilingual and bicultural background and how they were willing to use this in defense of their own people and the United States.

### Recognition

With the exception of the Navajo, to date little recognition has been given to these men and their tribes. Other than local tribal recognition, I know of only one major recognition. In 1989, the Oklahoma state Government and the Government of France recognized the Choctaw and Comanche tribes by presenting them with the Knights of the National order of Merit for their service as Code talkers in France during World both World Wars.

Based on the known number of Navajo Code Talkers (420) and those of other smaller groups, I would estimate that around a total of 600 Native American men served in this role during the Second World War. This is of course only a rough estimate based on the information at hand. Many of the small groups appear to have been informally developed strategies when a commander realized that he had several member of the same tribe within a relatively small unit. It should also be realized that code talkers also performed the wide array of other signal company or other communications operators, including the transmission of some messages in English.

Beyond admirable military service records, several Native American Code talkers made significant combat contributions. Solomon Louis (Choctaw) won the Croix de Guerre from France and the Silver Star from General Pershing In World War I, Schlicht Billy is reported to have been the first American to break through the Siegfried Line, capturing a machine gun nest and receiving serious wounds in doing so. Followed by the effort of Major Jack Treadwell and other members of the unit, this allowed for a major opening in the Siegfried Line to be exploited. Comanche Code Talkers Willie Yacheschi, Robert Holder, Larry Saupitty, Forrest Kassanavoid, and Perry Noyabad were all wounded in action and several of the Comanche received Bronze Stars. The contributions of members of the Comanche and Navajo Code talkers to tribal cultural retention, tribal government, language classes, veteran's affairs, and other activities are well documented in published sources.

Additional research may be able to identify other individual code talkers, especially with the Hopi, Sac and Fox, and Chippewa-Oneida groups.

In sum, I urge the Committee to seek to pass legislation aimed at obtaining a form of national recognition for these gentlemen, many of who have already passed on. Ideally this award should identify as many tribes, and where possible, those individuals involved in this unique form of military service. Possible awards might include; individual certificates and medals for the individuals, plaques of recognition for their respective tribal governments to display in their tribal complexes, and perhaps even a small monument in the nation's capital explaining and commemorating their service.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to these hearings. If I may be of future assistance in these proceedings please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

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